

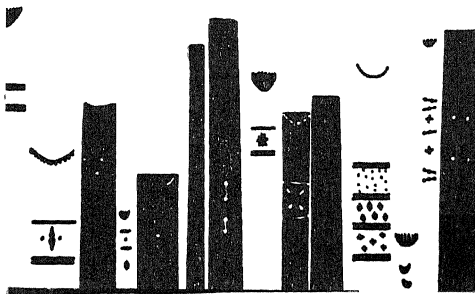
ARTISTS'
FAMILIES

EUGENE BRIEUX

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ARTISTS' FAMILIES



VOLUME XXI
The Drama League Series of Plays

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ARTISTS' FAMILIES (MÉNAGES D'ARTISTES)

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY
EUGENE BRIEUX

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
BARRETT H. CLARK



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
J. R. CRAWFORD

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1918

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INTRODUCTION

M. Brieux is something of a paradox among French dramatists. If one can imagine a stern Puritan of Shakespeare's day deliberately choosing the theatre as a medium for the display of moral ideas, one has some hint of M. Brieux's theory of the stage. Luckily, however, M. Brieux is something more than a platitudinous moralist. He has the rare good fortune to be at the same time a practical dramatist, nor does the fervour of his ethical principles entirely obscure his sense of humour. And so it comes to pass that while his plays are scourges and rods for a degenerate world, they are also interesting entertainment enclosing within their framework many shrewd and amusing observations on characters and manners.

It is not so paradoxical for an English or American author to confuse art and ethics, since Anglo-Saxons have been prone to do this time out of mind. But it is an extraordinary procedure for a French dramatist. M. Brieux found the serious French stage

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largely occupied with plays whose plots concerned themselves with the conventional triangle, or else with the then receding waves of sword and cloak, love and honour, and the old-fashioned paraphernalia of pseudo-romance. In neither form of drama was there any evidence of true vitality. Such morality as the stage was witness to was chiefly the morality whose standards were rooted in melodrama rather than in life. Heroines were virtuous and objects of Machiavellian pursuits. Virtue was rewarded at the final curtain by the hand of an equally noble hero, while the symbol of evil, represented by the well-dressed villain, never did prosper for more than a few scenes. Such a convenient simplification of life had been accepted by audiences as the natural stock-in-trade of drama. No one seems to have asked if this were like life. Least of all did it occur to the average dramatists to make social sermons of their plays.

It may be objected that there had been many examples of social drama, or plays with an ethical purpose, in France before M. Brieux's works made their first appearance at the Théâtre Libre. And this objection, of course, is valid. From Diderot onward there had been social drama and numerous

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plays written to expound a particular theory of life. But there is a difference between these earlier dramas and those of M. Brieux. If one may be permitted the distinction, it is this: the earlier plays dealt with lesser social questions—were rather concerned with the application of poetic justice to real life—with the problems of the outer edge of society and similar themes, while in M. Brieux we have that challenge of the whole social order which has also its expression in a specific school of modern political philosophy. Not that M. Brieux preaches socialism in his plays, but he does question the entire organization of society, from its methods of education to its administration of justice. No other social dramatist in France has, up to this time, laid out so comprehensive a programme of ethico-dramatic material.

M. Brieux brings to the consideration of his problems a hatred of shams, a clear insight into the weaknesses of an industrial democracy founded on the principles of *laissez-faire*, and a sense for logic which is as merciless in its clarity as that of Jonathan Swift. Yet with all this he can pause to smile at human failings, when these are individual and not social, and he knows how to use his gleaming lances of wit with all the practised skill of the French *littér-*

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ateur. Last of all, his sense of logic has also made him master of the structural formulas of drama. His later plays, in particular, have frequently been compared to a demonstration in plane geometry. Grant him his axioms and he has no difficulty in justifying the Q. E. D. of the final curtain. This gift he has in common with many other French dramatists, for they all come of a logical race.

Such a method, however, when applied to the structure of social drama, involves certain artistic perils. In the first place, it has been hinted that one must grant M. Brieux the axioms with which he sets out, or one will not necessarily be convinced by the subsequent equations. When these axioms are seen to be well founded upon those universal facts of life which we all accept, even when we cannot always explain them, it is not so difficult to persuade us that they naturally combine in his plot, as the dramatist shows us they do, to form a true illustration of a certain phase of life. On the other hand, if the dramatist errs in looking upon certain ideas as axiomatic which experience still holds to be matters in dispute, to treat these ideas as fundamental truths may easily lead to a falsification of life and consequent artistic failure.

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The second artistic peril has to do with the problem of characterization within the limits of a mathematical formula. Let us suppose that M. Brioux is starting with one of his social theses which have already been referred to as the axioms of his equations. The story which shall illustrate the thesis must march rigidly parallel with it. There must be just those characters necessary to the action and no more. At most, as I believe Mr. Augustus Thomas has pointed out in connection with his own dramatic work, the character requirements are: someone in favour of the theme; someone opposed to it; and someone whose attitude at first is one of strict neutrality. The conversion of the latter character to a view favourable to the thesis is necessary to convince the audience, just as Horatio's skepticism toward Hamlet's ghost and his sudden conversion lend most powerful aid to making the audience also accept it. But the very difficulty with this simple arrangement of the principal characters is that these puppets are thereby less likely to speak their own minds than they are to voice opinions necessary to the demonstration of the plot. In short, there is grave danger that they will become pieces of mechanism instead of human beings.

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Enough has been said to point out the artistic dangers of combining the expressions of ethical views with the art of the drama. Specific reference to certain plays of M. Brieux, in which these artistic perils have been revealed, has been purposely omitted. It is better for the reader to form his own judgment in these matters. The dangers are common to all thesis playwriting, or rather to didacticism in art in general. M. Brieux has written many plays which are true pictures of life and absorbing drama, in spite of these risks. The play which this volume contains is a case in point.

"*Ménages d'artistes*," an early play, is a wholesome warning against making a pose the chief aim of life, and, even more, of coming ultimately to believe in one's pose. The theme is not one of the great social problems with which the later plays deal, but it is characteristic of Brieux that, at the outset of his career as a dramatist, it should be the shams of literature which he first assails. This is a kind of putting his house in order before breaking a lance with more formidable windmills. And as one reads this play of the eighties, when æstheticism and symbolism were being misunderstood by the seekers after novelty and notoriety, one is struck by the

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fact that its theme has not aged at all. It could still be read with profit not a thousand miles from Washington Square. Substitute for M. Brioux's sarcastic references to the emotional vagueness of his characters' literary productions some of the cant terms of certain contemporary "advanced" artists, and the cap would fit many tolerably well. As for *vers libre* itself, that present-day excrescence on our monthly periodicals, what better summary of it could there be than

EMMA [à JACQUES]. Ah! monsieur Tervaux!
. . . La France compte un grand poète de plus.
Ce sera une gloire, pour vous, d'avoir débarrassé la
poésie des entraves qui alourdissaient son vol.
Maintenant, plus de rimes!

TOMBELAIN. Des hiatus!

DIVOIRE. Plus de majuscules au commencement
des vers!

EMMA. La poésie de l'avenir. N'est-ce pas, Docteur?

LE DOCTEUR. De la vraie prose, enfin!

In fact the whole of this play is a protest against a false Bohemianism, against incompetents whose self-admiring and parasitical friends have persuaded them that Pegasus is preferable to the family circle and the

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business for which they are fitted. At times the comic circle of would-be artists and poets draws close to the border line of farcical exaggeration, but on the whole the picture is a true one, and the practical, sane theory of life—implied by the author—thoroughly sound.

Yale University.

J. R. CRAWFORD.

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PERSONS IN THE PLAY

JACQUES TERVAUX

DIVOIRE

PINGOUX

D'ESTOMBREUSE

DAVENAY

TOMBELAIN

DOCTOR MEILLERET

CABÈREBAC

ALEXANDRE VEULE

THE SUB-EDITOR

BERNARD, the cashier

LOUISE TERVAUX, wife of Jacques

EMMA VERNIER

MME. LEGRAND, mother of Louise Tervaux

MME. DIVOIRE

GABRIELLE, daughter of Jacques

Scene: Paris.

*Time: First and second acts, July, 1889; third act,
November of the same year.*

Scenes

- Act I.* *Dining-room in the house of Jacques Tervaux. Evening.*
- Act II.* *The same, a day or two later.*
- Act III.* *Editorial offices of the "Journal des Poètes Mondains." An afternoon four months later.*

ARTISTS' FAMILIES

Act I

ACT I

In the home of JACQUES TERVAUX.

July, 1889, eight o'clock at night. The scene is the typical French middle-class dining room. At the back of the stage is a tall imitation-antique oak sideboard. In the centre of the stage is an oval table with cover. Above this is a palm in an earthenware jar, placed on a saucer behind which is a Japanese screen. Down-stage to the right is a piano; above it the door leading into JACQUES' study. Down-stage to the left is another door, leading to other rooms; above it, a fireplace; above this, the entrance to the room, leading into a small antechamber. Various high-backed oak chairs about the sideboard. An armchair on one side of the piano, and a tabouret on the other. Hanging over the table is a slender, suspended lamp, which is now lighted. Hung about the walls are a number of impressionistic paintings, many of which are unframed.

As the curtain rises, LOUISE takes the palm,

which is on the table, carries it into the antechamber, and returns a moment later. GABRIELLE listens at the door to the right.

GABRIELLE [*to her mother, as she listens*]. Shh! Shh!

LOUISE [*going toward her on tiptoe*]. How far along is your father?

GABRIELLE. He's reading the last poem in his volume. You know the one: "Death is a birth to th' eternal life."

LOUISE. Aren't they applauding?

GABRIELLE. No, but they're saying "Oh! Oh!"—which is still better.

LOUISE. Then we barely have time to get the tea ready.

GABRIELLE [*returning*]. There's no hurry. Mademoiselle Vernier is there, and as soon as father finishes, they will certainly discuss the *Journal des Poètes Mondains* that she is going to found.

LOUISE. You are right. But we can at least light the candles over the fireplace. [*She lights them.*] You may go and get the tray and cups. Don't break anything.

GABRIELLE. Shall I put everything on the table?

LOUISE. Yes.

[GABRIELLE goes out through the antechamber door, and returns shortly afterward with the tray, which she puts on the table.]

GABRIELLE. There!

LOUISE. Did you turn down the gas in the kitchen?

GABRIELLE. Yes.

LOUISE. Not too much, I hope? The tea water should be kept at the boiling point.

GABRIELLE. It's just right. [*A pause.*] Is grandmother still asleep?

LOUISE. After an eighteen-hours' trip on an excursion train! I should think so. She came with a singing society on its way here to see the Exposition.

GABRIELLE. And so——

LOUISE. She didn't close an eye.

GABRIELLE. Then she won't be down this evening?

LOUISE. I don't think so. In any event, tomorrow we'll all go to the Exposition together.

GABRIELLE. Oh, how lovely!

LOUISE. Shh! Hush! Listen! [*They listen for something in the direction of the door at the right.*]

GABRIELLE. They're applauding.

LOUISE [*arranging the chairs*]. He has so much talent! Put the little spoons on the saucers.

GABRIELLE. Yes, mamma. But it is too bad that we had to put grandma in the maid's room.

LOUISE. Yes, but we couldn't put Mademoiselle Vernier out, could we? She's so comfortably settled in that room. [*She points to the door on the left.*] She can go out whenever she likes——

GABRIELLE. Some one knocked. [*She opens the door, and returns a moment later with MME. LEGRAND.*]

LOUISE [*going to her mother*]. Up so soon! Did you get a little rest after your trip?

MME. L. [*who wears a cap and speaks in a high-pitched voice*]. Not very much. Your Paris is so dreadfully noisy! [*Looking about her.*] Dearie me, how pretty your house is!

LOUISE [*looking toward the door on the right*]. Yes—Shh!

MME. L. [*in a loud voice*]. What time do you go to bed here?

LOUISE. Not so loud, please——

MME. L. What's the matter?

LOUISE. Nothing. [*With a smile.*] You're speaking a little loud——

MME. L. What of it? You can hear all the better.

LOUISE. Well—you see—my husband is there, in his office—working——

MME. L. Oh, yes, your husband. What's he doing now? He doesn't seem very anxious to see me. [*She goes toward the door on the right.*] Is he there?

LOUISE [*quickly stopping her*]. Yes—with some friends.

MME. L. Oh—well. As we say in our part of the country, the more foolish people are, the more they laugh.

LOUISE. He's occupied with very serious business.

GABRIELLE. Oh, yes, grandmother: he's reading to some friends of his his latest volume of poetry: "Les Flavescences."

MME. L. What?

GABRIELLE. "Les Flavescences."

MME. L. Is that French?

GABRIELLE. Somewhat. I left the reading to help mamma.

MME. L. [*taking from her pocket a sock which she has been working on, and sitting down to knit*]. Well, go back and listen. I'll wait.

[GABRIELLE *walks away on tiptoe, and with infinite precaution opens the door. As she does this, applause bursts upon the ear, and exclamations of "Bravo!" and "Transcendant!"* The noise ceases as GABRIELLE closes the door after her. MME. LEGRAND is seated at the table to the left. LOUISE sets the table while she is talking.]

Well, aren't you going in to applaud him?

LOUISE [*gaily*]. You know, mamma, women don't understand much about modern literature.

MME. L. Women! I heard the voice of one in there!

LOUISE. Oh, yes: Mademoiselle Vernier! She's founding a paper, and perhaps Jacques will be the editor-in-chief. She's in the movement.

MME. L. What's that?

LOUISE [*laughing*]. Yes, in the movement; in the midst of it all. She writes poetry—follows the literary styles. And she's very amusing, and good-hearted. Quite young, too——

MME. L. You're young, yourself.

LOUISE. Oh, thirty-three.

MME. L. Well, what about me? How old is she?

LOUISE. Twenty-five.

MME. L. Are her parents here with her?

LOUISE. She's an orphan.

MME. L. Where did you come to know her?

LOUISE. She's an old school friend of mine.

MME. L. And yet she's eight years younger than you!

LOUISE. She was one of the youngest when I graduated.

MME. L. Where did you meet her again?

LOUISE. At the home of friends a few weeks ago. She is the one who recognized *me*, but I at once remembered her quite well.

MME. L. Where does she live?

LOUISE. Here.

MME. L. With you?

LOUISE. For a few days, yes. I offered her the hospitality of our home until she finds an office for her paper. She was afraid to go to a hotel.

MME. L. Is she poor?

LOUISE. No, she's rich.

MME. L. And still unmarried!

LOUISE. She doesn't want to marry.

MME. L. What's she been doing since she left school?

LOUISE. Travelling.

MME. L. Hm! [*A pause.*] Why are you using those cups? Why don't you use the silver service I gave you?

LOUISE [*embarrassed*]. Oh, this is good enough!

MME. L. No, use the other, just to please me!

LOUISE. I don't know where it is.

MME. L. You don't know where it is? It cost me four hundred francs!

LOUISE. Oh, yes, I know where it is: on the other side.

MME. L. There? I'll get it.

LOUISE. No.

MME. L. Why not?

LOUISE. Oh—Well, mamma, I think I had better tell you at once: it's pawned.

MME. L. Merciful heavens! I thought your husband made so much money out of his books.

LOUISE. He does, only lately, business has been bad.

MME. L. When one's business is bad, he should go into another.

LOUISE [*calmly*]. It is an artist's duty to suffer without renouncing. Art is a battlefield; whoever deserts is a coward.

MME. L. You talk like a book.

LOUISE. Jacques has too much talent not to become rich and celebrated some day.

MME. L. And what do you live on meantime? Do you work?

LOUISE. Jacques would never allow me to.

MME. L. Why?

LOUISE. He is too proud.

MME. L. For himself, of course!

LOUISE. If you only knew how good he is to me, how deeply he loves me!

MME. L. That's the least he could do. Then you live on the three hundred francs a month I send you?

LOUISE. Practically.

MME. L. And your earrings?

LOUISE. My earrings?

MME. L. Yes, the ones your godfather gave you at Le Puy, on your wedding day.

LOUISE. Oh!

MME. L. Are they sold?

LOUISE. Yes.

MME. L. And are you happy?

LOUISE [*sincerely*]. Very happy, I assure you. Money worries don't bother me. [*She kisses her mother.*]

MME. L. Good. Now I have an idea for your husband. You know Gilbert, foreman of Messieurs Danglet? He's just retired.

LOUISE. Well?

MME. L. Well, there's a position that pays two hundred and fifty francs a month, with board and lodging. That's better than poetry——

LOUISE. Impossible. Please don't bother, mamma dear. [*She listens off-stage to the right.*] I think they're finishing in there. We'll talk about this later on. Wouldn't you like to have a little rest?

MME. L. I've just had a rest.

LOUISE. Well, you see——

MME. L. But you'd rather have me go——?

LOUISE. No——only——

MME. L. Because of my cap! I'll take it off. Now are you satisfied?

LOUISE. Of course. [*Aside.*] What will Jacques say?

MME. L. Then I'm curious to see everything in Paris, and I never saw a poet before. [*A bell rings.*]

LOUISE. There's the bell.

MME. L. I'll be back in five minutes. [*She goes out left.*]

MME. DIVOIRE [*in the antechamber*]. Madame Tervaux, if you please.

MME. L. [*also in the antechamber*]. This way, madame. [*She re-enters.*] A lady who wishes to speak with you. Come in, madame. See you soon again. [MME. L. *goes out.*]

[*Enter MME. DIVOIRE.*]

LOUISE. Ah, Madame Divoire, how are you?

MME. D. [*a delicate, simple, small-statured woman, evidently unwell. She is a prey to deep emotion*]. Very well, thank you.

LOUISE. How do you happen to be here at this time?

MME. D. [*embarrassed*]. Why—nothing—I was going—— When I was passing your house, I saw the windows lighted up. And I thought I should run in and say, How d'ye do to you. That's why I came.

LOUISE. What is the matter with you?

MME. D. [*with restraint*]. Nothing, nothing. [*She makes a grimace, then takes her handkerchief from her pocket, and cries.*] My husband isn't here, Madame Tervaux?

LOUISE. Yes, he is. There. Monsieur Tervaux and his friends——

MME. D. [*falling into a chair*]. How glad I am! [*She continues crying.*] I beg your pardon. But I was so worried; such absurd notions ran through my brain!

LOUISE. Why?

MME. D. He wasn't in all night. I was at the window till morning, watching each of the few wayfarers so anxiously. Every cab that passed I thought he was in; I thought it was bringing him home, dead!

LOUISE. How could you think such things?

MME. D. This is the first time a thing like that has happened. I was at the prefecture of police at seven o'clock this morning, and I thought that every one would be just as excited as I. And the office wasn't even open. I waited. The clerks tried hard not to laugh at me. It seems it's excruciatingly funny for a woman to be looking for her husband who's not spent the night at home.

LOUISE. But why did you go to the prefecture?

MME. D. I don't know. Sometimes he gets drunk!—and then I thought they had arrested him. Then I went to the Morgue. Maybe an accident——?

LOUISE. Oh, you poor——!

MME. D. And in the afternoon, my son went to

all the cafés. He finally learned that at the time when people have their absinthe, his father had been seen in the Faubourg Montmartre——

LOUISE. And didn't he come home for dinner?

MME. D. No! I've waited till now. So, at last, he's in there! I'm dead tired.

LOUISE. Would you like me to get him?

MME. D. Yes, in a few moments. Not just now: if he saw I'd been crying, he'd scold me. [*She blows her nose into her handkerchief and then wipes her eyes.*]

LOUISE [*going toward the left door*]. How many women there are who spend such nights!

MME. D. Madame Tervaux——!

LOUISE [*returning with a glass of water*]. Here—— dampen your eyes with this—a little on your handkerchief. It'll do you good.

MME. D. [*wetting one corner of her handkerchief*]. He's not bad, you understand. He was simply—— carried away——

LOUISE. Yes, I know: friends——

MME. D. You know what artists are, don't you?

LOUISE. Yes: they're not like petty shopkeepers.

MME. D. Of course not. They require an over-excited sort of life.

LOUISE. And if they don't have it, they fail to get the proper inspiration.

MME. D. So *your* husband tells you that, too?

LOUISE. Yes.

MME. D. But, you see, when you have four children——

LOUISE. Four children!

MME. D. *They* don't know that, do they?

LOUISE. No: they must have their daily bread.

MME. D. Well, they have that. Only, not long ago, Pierre was sent home because his tuition wasn't paid.

LOUISE [*hesitatingly*]. Er—Madame Divoire—I could lend you ten francs. I can afford it. You may pay me back whenever you're able.

MME. D. Oh, thank you so much, Madame Tervaux, we're not so low as that. André is going to get an advance to-morrow from a publisher——

LOUISE. But I really meant it.

MME. D. Yes, you're very kind, but I don't need the money. André needn't know a thing about it, need he? There must have been most extraordinary

circumstances, because, in the first place, he promised to stop drinking absinthe——

LOUISE. Yes—of course——

MME. D. I know, Madame Tervaux, but you must keep watch over *your* husband——

LOUISE. Yes. Do you want me to bring Monsieur Divoire to you?

MME. D. If you please; I just want a word with him.

[LOUISE goes and very softly opens the door on the right, through which GABRIELLE appears.]

LOUISE. Tell Monsieur Divoire that his wife is here and would like to speak to him.

GABRIELLE. Very well, mamma. [She goes out.]

LOUISE [to MME. D.]. He's coming.

MME. D. Thank you. I'm so sorry to have disturbed you, only——

LOUISE. Here he is—I'll leave you. [LOUISE goes out left, as DIVOIRE enters from the opposite side.]

MME. D. [whose manner rapidly changes from what it was in MME. TERVAUX'S presence]. So here you are!

DIVOIRE. Why, yes. I'll explain——

MME. D. Then you weren't arrested, or run over, or attacked, or sick——!

DIVOIRE. You see—— I—I beg your pardon——

MME. D. And you allow me to be driven almost crazy! I imagined you dead——!

DIVOIRE. Come, now, Suzanne, I did wrong, I admit. But if you imagined me dead and now see me living, you ought to be glad.

MME. D. I'm perfectly furious!

DIVOIRE. But if I'm neither arrested, nor run over, nor beaten, you oughtn't to blame me!

MME. D. I'm blaming you for all the useless worry you've caused me. Oh! Oh! What have you been doing?

DIVOIRE. I've been with—What's-his-name, the painter; he was telling me about his new picture that he's going to exhibit at the *Independents'*—a great sunlight picture—in the fields—nothing—light—that's it!

MME. D. And then?

DIVOIRE. Then—there was a *première* at the Comédie Française; we hissed it—naturally. Then—I don't know. I went to sleep. And this evening I didn't dare come home to dinner.

MME. D. And hadn't you any idea how I must have been crying all the while?

DIVOIRE [*sympathetically*]. Poor dear wife! Don't blame me too much. You know, an artist is just a big child. You must be indulgent with him. It will never happen again. Forgive me. There, I'm a wicked wretch—a beast, a pig, anything you like. Now—it's all over, isn't it?

MME. D. It must be. What time are you coming home?

DIVOIRE. I'll come right after you; in half an hour I'll be there.

MME. D. Truly, dear André?

DIVOIRE. Truly!

MME. D. Did you see the publisher?

DIVOIRE. The publisher?

MME. D. Yes—to get your advance?

DIVOIRE [*in three different tones of voice*]. Oh! Oh! Oh! No—I forgot!

MME. D. You know we have scarcely anything left at home.

DIVOIRE [*very sincerely*]. Poor woman! I'll bring you what you need at once. What's-his-name owes me, and he has money. Good-bye; see you shortly.

MME. D. Don't be too long.

DIVOIRE. No, no, no. I'll just say good-bye to Tervaux, and then—[*calling back his wife, who is on the point of leaving*—tell me, you didn't tell any one here——? You didn't see any one, did you?

MME. D. No.

DIVOIRE. Ah. You are the best woman alive! I adore you! [*To himself.*] That's true. I can think of any number of women who would have made fearful scenes! [*He goes out, right.*]

[*From the antechamber are heard sounds from*

LOUISE and MME. LEGRAND, *who are being polite to* MME. DIVOIRE: “You, first, please”—“Good evening, Madame!” etc.]

MME. L. [*entering, with her back to the audience*]. Good evening, madame, good evening!

LOUISE [*entering in like manner*]. Good evening!

MME. L. How do you like me this way?

LOUISE. Yes. Wait, I hear something. My husband has finished. [*She listens.*] His reading must have been a great success. [*To her mother.*] Sit down there.

[*Enter JACQUES. MME. LEGRAND takes up her sock again and continues knitting.*]

LOUISE [*going to her husband*]. Well?

JACQUES [*enthusiastically, as he kisses her*]. My dearest, I must kiss you! It was a huge success!

LOUISE [*radiantly*]. How glad I am! [*To her mother.*] D'you hear?

JACQUES. Why, are you there, mamma? [*He kisses her rather perfunctorily and nervously.*]

MME. L. Yes. Are you well?

JACQUES. Very well, thank you.

MME. L. So am I.

JACQUES [*to LOUISE, who is up-stage*]. What liqueurs have you?

LOUISE. Madeira, cognac, and rum.

JACQUES. Good. Everything is going smoothly—you know, about the *Journal des Poètes Mondains*. I'll tell you—[*very gaily and frankly*]. If you only knew how Mademoiselle Vernier applauded me! In “*Les Flavescences*” there are poems that she alone can understand. Have you all this ready for us? May we come now?

LOUISE. Yes.

JACQUES [*to MME. L.*]. You're tired, aren't you, mamma? Wouldn't you like to rest yourself a little?

MME. L. No, thank you.

JACQUES. Well—er—I don't think you'd be at all interested in what is going on here now.

MME. L. Isn't Louise going to stay?

JACQUES. But Louise doesn't count. I'm going to bring them in now. Is everything ready? [*Aside to LOUISE.*] Why didn't you get her out of the way?

LOUISE [*aside to JACQUES*]. I couldn't. She won't bother you.

JACQUES [*in a conciliatory mood*]. Perhaps not, after all. [*Opening the door at the right.*] Mesdames, Messieurs, tea is served.

[*Enter the guests, GABRIELLE, and Mlle.*

VERNIER. GABRIELLE *enters first, and very quickly.*]

GABRIELLE [*aside to her mother*]. Shall I bring the tea?

LOUISE [*aside to her*]. In five minutes.

[GABRIELLE ' *goes out, left.* JACQUES *goes and talks with LOUISE and MME. LEGRAND.*

DIVOIRE and PINGOUX *enter together, talking.*]

DIVOIRE. That book is a sensation! A sensation: "Les Fleurs du mal" born again, sublimated and blooming once more.

DAVENAY [*entering with TOMBELAIN, an elegantly dressed young man*]. It's as beautiful as Victor Hugo!

TOMBELAIN. Hugo? Only Hugo? You poor fellow! Hugo is a microbe beside him!

DAVENAY. But—Hugo, you know—“*La Légende des Siècles*”——?

TOMBELAIN [*with a paternal air*]. A microbe! Don't admire Hugo here, my friend; you'll call attention to yourself.

DAVENAY [*losing his courage*]. Oh, really, I don't care that for Hugo!

DIVOIRE [*to D'ESTOMBREUSE, who enters, smoking a pipe*]. What do you think of Tervaux's book, D'Estombreuse?

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Not bad, but still, it hasn't exactly hit the mark. A book either does or does not. Well, this does not!

JACQUES [*drawing near to this group*]. And—Mademoiselle Vernier?

D'ESTOMBREUSE. She is talking with your friend the Doctor. Now she's coming.

JACQUES [*assembling his friends—aside*]. I ask your pardon: my wife's mother is here—just arrived from the country—to visit the Exposition. You

understand—these little family annoyances? Of course, I am not ashamed of her.

DR. MEILLERET [*who has just entered*]. She hasn't killed any one, has she?

JACQUES. Oh, Doctor!

DR. M. I didn't know! [EMMA *bursts out laughing*.]

JACQUES. Why is Mademoiselle Vernier laughing so?

D'ESTOMBREUSE. It's that little Pingoux.

JACQUES. We're waiting for you alone, Mademoiselle Vernier.

EMMA [*very stylishly dressed, enters*]. Here I am. Dear Pingoux—he's unique! [*She comes down-stage, passing between two rows of guests*.]

PINGOUX [*entering*]. He laughs best who laughs last.

EMMA. A good point, Monsieur Tervaux! The first issue of the *Journal des Poètes Mondains* is at your disposal.

JACQUES [*who does not take his eyes away from her*]. She is charming!

EMMA [*going to LOUISE and taking her hand*]. My dear Louise, you are a very fortunate woman.

LOUISE. Do you think so?

EMMA. To have a poet like this for a husband! He is simply astounding! [*She walks on, then stops short, astonished at seeing MME. LEGRAND.*]

LOUISE [*who has noticed this*]. My mother.

EMMA [*bowing*]. Madame.

MME. L. [*bows, readjusts her spectacles, and continues knitting*]. Nice sort of bird!

TOMBELAIN [*who, together with DIVOIRE, approaches LOUISE*]. What a poet your husband is, madame!

DIVOIRE. What soft and penetrating indifference!

TOMBELAIN. What a colorist, ah, what a colorist!

DR. M. Yes, what a colorist! Colorist, what a colorist!

PINGOUX [*bowing to MME. TERVAUX*]. Madame, Divoire's was a very pretty phrase; I shall make use of it in my write-up in the *Etoile des Arts*. I wish to give your husband a helping hand, madame.

DAVENAY [*to MME. TERVAUX*]. Ah, madame—Hugo—a microbe beside your husband!

[*Meantime, JACQUES is conversing, toward the left, with Mlle. VERNIER. GABRIELLE enters with the tea-service. During the following, she fills the cups.*]

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*to the Doctor*]. Do you think it's so marvellous, Doctor?

DR. M. Oh, for a young fellow, yes.

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*disdainfully*]. A young fellow? Tervaux! Oh, there is nothing young in literature but "Synthesism."

DR. M. I'll wager you're a Synthesist?

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Well, I am.

JACQUES [*who has come to get tea for EMMA*]. Mademoiselle—[*in an undertone, with dignity*—you are more ravishing than ever!

EMMA [*aside*]. You may observe, but you must not say it.

[GABRIELLE and LOUISE serve tea to the other guests.]

PINGOUX [*going to JACQUES*]. You know, I'm heartily in sympathy with you. Tell me, what do you prefer: an article by Fouquier, one of Caliban's, or one by me in the *Etoile des Arts*?

JACQUES. You ask me to choose. Well, keep your article for my next book.

PINGOUX. Just as you like. [*He goes to and speaks with DAVENAY.*]

TOMBELAIN [*to PINGOUX*]. Between you and me, I think Tervaux's book rather feeble.

DIVOIRE. No originality.

TOMBELAIN. Three more like that, and he'll enter the Academy.

DIVOIRE [*scandalized*]. No, no—don't say that!

TOMBELAIN. How unfortunate that Alexandre Veule, the mellifluous Tri-unionist poet, was not here! Tervaux invited him.

DIVOIRE. Then he'll arrive two hours late.

EMMA [*to JACQUES*]. Ah, Monsieur Tervaux, let me congratulate you once again! France has one more great poet. Glory will be yours for having freed poetry from the shackles which weighted its winged flight. Henceforth there are no rhymes!

TOMBELAIN. No hiatuses!

DIVOIRE. No more capitals at the beginning of each line!

EMMA. The Poetry of the Future! [*She goes over to the right, putting her cup on the table as she goes*]. Isn't it, Doctor?

DR. M. Real prose—at last!

EMMA. What? Don't you understand it? One is a poet the way one is a doctor. What, for instance, are the sensations you feel? To see suffering——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. To hear sighs sent forth from suffering breasts!

DIVOIRE. And how much greater, more pinkly sombre, more sombrely pink, is the life of the surgeon!

DR. M. And amusing! Oh, how much more amusing!

MME. L. [*to GABRIELLE, who is near her*]. Are all your father's friends crazy?

GABRIELLE. No, grandmamma, they just *seem* so.

EMMA [*to the Doctor*]. Poetry means nothing to you. Would you like to talk about painting? I do that, too.

DR. M. On china! Copies of Boucher!

EMMA. Well, because I'm so unfortunate as to be a woman, I'm condemned to paint china. Pink cupids; rouge mixed with cold cream! What ideas you have on the subject of women, Doctor! You imagine that in literature we have not gone beyond Madame Deshoullières and Marivaux; in painting, beyond the yet innocent Magdalens of Chaplin, or the shattered illusions of Greuze; in music, beyond Auber and Rossini!

TOMBELAIN [*to D'ESTOMBREUSE*]. Oh!

EMMA. And the scientific spirit! Progress! Why, I read Peladan, appreciate Claude Monet and Chabrier.

JACQUES. What audacity!

EMMA. Audacity? You're a product of 1880, I do declare, Monsieur Tervaux!

JACQUES [*who stands between LOUISE and EMMA*]. I confess myself in the wrong. [*To LOUISE.*] She is simply astounding! Why aren't you like her?

LOUISE [*aside to him*]. I haven't time.

JACQUES. You always say that. You ought to find time.

LOUISE. Who would do your mending then?

JACQUES [*to the Doctor*]. And you, old man, my oldest and best friend, what do you think of all this?

DR. M. Of your book? There are good things in it. Your friends—— Who is that behind me?

JACQUES. D'Estombreuse?

DR. M. The Synthesist.

JACQUES. Did he run me down?

DR. M. Yes.

JACQUES. He has a right to. He escaped vengeance.

DR. M. Why?

JACQUES. He has as yet produced nothing himself.

DR. M. Then how does he happen to be a friend of yours?

JACQUES. He says so many disagreeable things about other people that he pleases every one in turn. And, besides, we all know he won't be a dangerous rival.

PINGOUX [to EMMA]. Nothing easier. I'll get it for you whenever you like. I have a pull with the press.

DR. M. And that little fellow there who gets along so well with every one?

JACQUES. Pingoux? He is a reporter on the *Etoile des Arts*, a monthly review of the *café-concerts*.

DR. M. Doesn't he know any one?

JACQUES. Oh, yes. He's so obliging, and he imitates Coquelin Cadet to perfection.

DR. M. That is something.

JACQUES. Just now he is talking with Davenay, a fashionable poet, who is on the staff of the paper Mademoiselle Vernier is founding. He's a son of the Luxembourg stores.

DR. M. And that one, by the side of the Synthesist?

JACQUES. That's Tombelain. He's a type. He writes books to order, for people who engage him

for that purpose. He is the one who put the following notice in the *Figaro*: "Successful Parisian dramatist proposes anonymous collaboration."

DR. M. Has he talent?

JACQUES. Endless—except when he writes for himself. He also writes special wedding poems. Good, sincere fellow—only—— [*He continues in an undertone.*]

DIVOIRE [*to TOMBELAIN, excitedly*]. No, no, my dear fellow; no, no——

TOMBELAIN. But, I——

DIVOIRE. Get rid of the sentimentality!

TOMBELAIN. Nonsense!

DIVOIRE. There is no such thing as filial love—no, nor conjugal love!

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Why!

DIVOIRE. We are all wretches; some of us are worse than others, that is all. For my own part, when my wife annoys me, I tell her to mind her own business—and pretty peremptorily, too. Just a short time ago, right here——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. A wife is an obstacle to the artist.

TOMBELAIN. But what about the mother?

DIVOIRE [*derisively*]. Hush, D'Emery!

JACQUES [*to MEILLERET*]. You hear him?

DR. M. The one who denies the existence of filial love?

JACQUES. Yes. He's the father of four loving children; he trembles in the presence of his wife, and hides from her as if he had committed a crime; he supports an aged mother. Unfortunately, he gets drunk.

[*The bell rings. GABRIELLE goes and opens the door. ALEXANDRE VEULE enters.*]

PINGOUX. Here is Alexandre Veule, the mellifluous poet!

JACQUES. It's he! How are you, old man!

VEULE. How are you! Am I too late for the reading from "Les Flavescences?"

[*EMMA makes a gesture.*]

JACQUES. Yes.

VEULE. I'm heart-broken, old man. We'll foregather, however. Ah, what a poet you would be if you could only make up your mind, as I have, to accept Tri-unionism!

JACQUES. I don't dare. You see, I simply don't dare. I don't feel just as you do.

VEULE. Is purely verbal expression adequate for the tone-colour and vibration of atmospheric

atoms? I'll convince you with a word: the splendour of the calm, the darkness and mystery of cataclysms—are these not linked together? What have you to say to that?

JACQUES. Nothing, of course.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Every idea, every person, every object, possesses its own musical colour and tone.

VEULE. The bassoon is green, the violin blue, the trumpet red.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Of course.

VEULE. Just like the Infinite, the Infinite——

JACQUES. Yes?

VEULE. Which is *g* natural. [*Singing.*] *Ping!* [*Speaks.*] There is the Infinite and God—Do you know in what key God is?

JACQUES. No.

VEULE [*shocked*]. Dear me, he doesn't know! Why, in *c* major, you poor fellow!

DR. M. [*aside*]. And they really seem to understand each other!

VEULE. You ought to be a Tri-unionist, old man!

JACQUES. I'll see about it. Have some cognac?

VEULE. Indeed I will.

MME. L. What's the matter? Oh, your friends make me tired.

JACQUES. The idea!

MME. L. Oh, I beg your pardon: I thought they'd gone. I beg your pardon, messieurs, I'm very tired——

VEULE. Good-bye, my dear Tervaux.

JACQUES. But, my dear——!

DIVOIRE, PINGOUX, and TOMBELAIN. Good-bye, my dear Tervaux.

JACQUES. But——

ALL. Good-bye——

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*to VEULE*]. Posterity will avenge us! [*As he leaves.*] It was so beautiful. Our hats are in the antechamber.

JACQUES. But, I beg your pardon. I——

VEULE. Good-bye. [*He goes out.*]

DR. M. My dear Tervaux——

JACQUES. Are you going, too?

DR. M. But not for the same reason as the rest. I agree with you, madame. [*He bows.*] See you soon again, Jacques. Madame—— [*He goes out.*]

EMMA. I, too, must leave you. You must have a great deal to talk about with your mother-in-law. I must go and dress now. See you later. [*She goes out, down-stage left.*]

JACQUES [*to GABRIELLE*]. Go to your room. I'll call you later. [*She goes out, up-stage right.*]

JACQUES [*to his mother-in-law*]. Well, are you satisfied with what you have done? Here I am at outs with my best friends; and even with Mademoiselle Vernier herself.

LOUISE. But, my dear, mamma didn't intend to hurt you——

MME. L. I thought I'd even done you a favour.

JACQUES. You're mistaken, you see.

MME. L. How much a year do you make with your poetry?

JACQUES. Madame, poetry is not a trade, like the baker's, the expenditures and receipts of which can be put down in a ledger. One is either a poet or he is not. If one is, he follows the path he has entered upon, without stopping for accidents on the way, or the pettinesses of existence.

MME. L. But what if one isn't a poet and yet believes he is? Has a man the right to make his wife suffer? To ruin his child?

JACQUES. The poet has a sacred mission to fulfill on earth—an imperious duty to follow.

MME. L. His first duty is to bring the daily bread to the home.

LOUISE. But, mamma, we don't want for anything!

MME. L. Really! Then why do you sell your earrings and pawn your silver?

JACQUES. I'm truly sorry. Really, I never thought of that. I confess I've often doubted myself; seeing misery threatening us, and Louise suffering so many privations without a murmur of complaint, I have had terrific struggles with myself. I swore I would throw my pen away, extinguish the fire I feel burning here——! But is it my fault if a greater power than my will forces me to break that oath; if an imperious, unsurmountable inspiration comes to trouble me; if in my moments of despair a voice cries out to me: "Courage! Courage, you will conquer!"

LOUISE [*to* MME. L.]. You see? He's not really bad!

MME. L. When a person has a disease like that he has no business marrying. He should be free to live in a garret on four sous a day. But when he marries, and spends all his wife's dowry, he ought rather to become a rag-picker than allow her to starve. You are in debt; you are falling still deeper in debt; where will you turn when your creditors get tired of lending?

JACQUES. If I could only find a publisher for my book, we should be rich.

MME. L. And if you can't?

JACQUES. I will.

LOUISE. And, dear, you must also remember, your book may be a masterpiece, and still not sell.

JACQUES. What do you want me to do?

MME. L. If you had an offer of three thousand francs a year, with board, lodging, heat——?

LOUISE. You could do your own work at night?

JACQUES. But I haven't the offer.

MME. L. Yes, you have. Gilbert, the foreman of Danglet and Company, has just left.

JACQUES. I can't accept.

MME. L. Do you refuse?

JACQUES. Absolutely.

LOUISE. But, my dear——

JACQUES. That's enough, Louise! I've been patient enough with your mother, especially after the impolite way she behaved with my friends. My patience is exhausted. I've said no, and no it is to be. I don't want to hear another word about the matter.

MME. L. My poor daughter! [*She cries.*] If I had only known! What have I done to the Good

Lord? I have no child now! No child. [*She starts to leave, sobbing.*]

LOUISE [*likewise crying*]. Don't cry, mamma.

MME. L. Dear me—dear me—— You'll die in misery! [*Both go out, right.*]

JACQUES. Not very amusing here! What am I going to do? I can't work. Good Lord, what a nuisance!

[*Enter Mlle. VERNIER, left, in street dress. She is buttoning up her gloves.*]

EMMA. Ah, my dear poet, I'm going to the Exposition, and then I'm going to buy a ticket to the Opera for to-morrow. Would you like to come with me?

JACQUES. Delighted!

Curtain

ACT II

ACT II

The scene is the same. LOUISE and MME. LEGRAND are present.

MME. L. Well?

LOUISE. Well, you were right.

MME. L. I told you so. He went out with her yesterday, too.

LOUISE. With her?

MME. L. He's just come in.

LOUISE. Is he in his study?

MME. L. Yes.

LOUISE. Then she won't be long.

MME. L. Did you follow her?

LOUISE. Yes.

MME. L. Did she go to meet him?

LOUISE. He was waiting for her at the café.

MME. L. Did she go in?

LOUISE. No. The moment he saw her, he got up, offered his arm, and the two went off together. I hadn't the strength to go on. I walked straight

ahead without looking where I went, crying like a little fool. And the mad ideas that went through my head. I couldn't begin to tell you. Oh, God, I want to die!

MME. L. Die? Have you forgotten me?

LOUISE. I know it's wrong at my age. After seventeen years of marriage, to take it into my head to be jealous! But suffering comes to one without being called, and does not go merely because one reasons about it.

MME. L. What do you intend to do?

LOUISE. Yes, what? Nothing. Wait. Cry.

MME. L. You won't say anything to them?

LOUISE. What could I say? Could I let him know I had descended to the level of a spy? He would say high-sounding things to me and I shouldn't know what to answer; he'd prove that *I* was in the wrong, that *I* ought to be ashamed. Let her know I am jealous? She'd laugh at the idea; and then what proofs have I? He went out with her—well? He prefers her company to mine. What more natural? She is intelligent, young, attractive; I'm plain, old, and stupid.

MME. L. Look here, you're not going to let your husband be stolen from under your nose this way

are you? I won't have it! I suppose when she comes in here again, you'll kiss her, eh?

LOUISE. Oh, yes.

MME. L. And keep her here, and go on feeding her?

LOUISE. I have neither the strength nor the courage to do otherwise.

MME. L. Well, then, I have. I'll drive her out.

LOUISE. That would be wrong. He'll follow her.

MME. L. Very well: you'll come back and live with us.

LOUISE. And what will become of Gabrielle? And of me? Think; a woman who is separated!

MME. L. There's divorce.

LOUISE. We can't afford to get one. Justice is a very nice thing, but it's a luxury: it costs a great deal. I'm not poor enough to get assistance from the State, nor rich enough to do without it.

MME. L. Well, then?

LOUISE. Let them be. [*A bell is heard. To MME LEGRAND.*] There! Open the door; I don't want them to see I've been crying.

[*MME. LEGRAND goes out.*]

LOUISE. And how do I know I'm not mistaken?

How do I know he doesn't still love me? He can't have neglected me so suddenly!

[MME. LEGRAND *re-enters with a paper in her hand.*]

MME. L. See, this was brought here, and your husband dropped it on the stairs. [*Reads*]: "Théâtre de l'Opéra, two main-floor seats." A receipt for thirty-four francs—"Monsieur Tervaux." For to-night. He's not taking you, is he?

LOUISE. No. She's the one. The——! No, this is too much! You don't know what I have to bear; let me tell you. Do you know what Gabrielle and I have to do in order that he can afford such extravagances? In order that we can live? I must deprive myself of dresses; Gabrielle make her clothes out of remnants from bargain counters. I told you yesterday we were going to move because the apartment was too large. The truth is, we're being driven out. We owe three terms. We have no maid; the last we had left unpaid, but she took her wages out in insults on me. Stamped legal documents come, which the concierge hands me with a scornful air. It's not so amusing to be an artist's wife! If he'd only let me work! But this last is unbearable. I won't stand it!

MME. L. At last!

[Enter M^{lle}. VERNIER, *left*.]

EMMA. How are you, madame! How do you do, Louise! Everything all right? I'm just tired out. And I must go to the Opera to-night!

LOUISE. Don't go.

EMMA. I can't get out of it.

LOUISE. You're not going alone, are you?

EMMA. No.

LOUISE. Might I know whom you are going with?

EMMA. It's some one you don't know.

LOUISE. Oh! Some one I don't know?

EMMA. Yes.

LOUISE [*throwing the tickets in her face*]. There! If you haven't your seats, there they are; I pay for them!

EMMA. What's the matter with you?

LOUISE [*rising*]. The matter is, you're stealing my husband from me.

EMMA. You're crazy.

LOUISE [*becoming excited*]. I've had enough of your lies and your Judas-kisses!

MME. L. Good! At last!

EMMA. Madame, Louise is quite mistaken. I

can do very well if I have to explain to her alone, but I don't know what will happen if you insist on exciting her.

MME. L. Oh, so I'm in your way, mademoiselle! Good! I'll go, but only to attend to you. I'm preparing a little surprise for you—you'll tell me what you think of it.

EMMA. I don't care in the least what you do.

MME. L. Really? Very well, we'll see. [*She goes out.*]

EMMA. Now we're alone, will you explain what you have against me?

LOUISE. I tell you, you have made your way in here like a thief, and you are following a profession that your likes are in the habit of following on the streets at night.

EMMA. Ah, ha! You *are* friendly! Go on.

LOUISE. I say, you are taking my husband from me.

EMMA. And then?

LOUISE. That is all. Isn't it enough?

EMMA. What proofs have you?

LOUISE. You went to the Exposition together; day before yesterday you went out together. He waited for you at the café. This evening you were going to the Opera with him. Is that true?

EMMA. It is.

LOUISE. You see, then?

EMMA. That proves nothing.

LOUISE. Yes, it does: it proves that you are his mistress! It proves everything!

EMMA. I am not his mistress.

LOUISE. You lie!

EMMA. I tell you again, it is not so. I've stood enough of your insults. If you are determined not to listen to anything, I'll go. Believe whatever you like. [*She rises and starts to go.*]

LOUISE. Emma! Emma! No! I won't insult you any more! I'll speak quietly, if it isn't true, then prove it. I ask nothing better than to believe you. Oh, God, think of it, if he went away with you, you will have made a widow and an orphan—just for a whim!

EMMA. My poor Louise, I swear you have nothing to fear from me. Your husband made love to me, and I played the coquette. It never went beyond that—I swear! And for what *has* happened, please forgive me.

LOUISE [*taking her hands, and looking into her eyes*]. Is that really true?

EMMA [*sincerely*]. It is really true.

LOUISE. Listen to me: if you are lying, you'll make fun of me, but you will be more despicable than I am foolish. I believe you.

EMMA. You are right.

LOUISE. Now what are you going to do?

EMMA. Give him back to you.

LOUISE. How?

EMMA. He's in there, is he not?

LOUISE. Yes.

EMMA. You said nothing to him, did you?

LOUISE. No, nothing.

EMMA. Send him to me, and then leave us.

[LOUISE looks at her for some time.]

EMMA. Go. Don't be afraid.

[LOUISE goes to the door on the right and opens it.]

LOUISE. Jacques!

JACQUES [*outside—not too brutally*]. Don't bother me! Can't I have a moment for work in this house?

LOUISE. Emma wants to speak with you.

JACQUES [*appearing in the doorway*]. Oh, it's—[*bows*]*—Mademoiselle!* [*He comes in.*] How have you been since yesterday?

LOUISE [*standing at the back of the stage—aside*]. Ah!

JACQUES. Why don't you stay, Louise?

LOUISE. I haven't time. I'll see you later.

[*She goes out.*]

JACQUES. My dear Emma. This was a little too imprudent!

EMMA. I advise you to blame me——!

JACQUES. But——

EMMA. *You* are very prudent, aren't you—and clever?

JACQUES. I?

EMMA. Yes, you. Come down out of the clouds, my dear man: your wife knows everything.

JACQUES. Louise?

EMMA. Louise. She's just made a scene—here now; she treated me like —— and she was right, *I* think. Though it was rather embarrassing to bear things of the sort just because of a sentimental little walk to the *Galerie des machines* and an evening at the Opera in July! And to hear “*La Favorita*” with substitutes! Here, here are your tickets. Try to sell them again to some Englishman. You barely have time.

JACQUES. I don't understand you, Emma.

EMMA. I know that.

JACQUES. Explain yourself.

EMMA. In two words: you and I did very wrong

to flirt together. It's all over—all over—love your wife; she's much worthier than I. No harm's been done—luckily.

JACQUES. Do you think for one moment that I can stop like this? I love you!

EMMA. Oh, no! You want——? No poetry, now. There's no publisher here.

JACQUES. Emma, you must understand me. I'm not afraid of your sarcasm. I love you. I haven't known you for very long, but you have been a whole revelation to me of what woman is—and love. This is the first time I have loved, and with all my power——

EMMA. What is that to me? I don't love you!

JACQUES. You will come to love me. I adore you—madly!

EMMA. You're very troublesome with your love. Upon my word, men are extraordinary creatures. Because a spark of folly has been kindled in you, must I become crazy, too?

JACQUES. I would willingly give my life to make you happy.

EMMA. How stupid of you to rehearse these lines out of novels! You want me to be happy! Happiness is peace. Leave me——

JACQUES. You will love me—and soon——

EMMA. Supposing I did; what then?

JACQUES. We should be happy.

EMMA. Nonsense! You'd love me for six months and then you'd become a husband once more, a re-married widower, and talk to me about Louise's wonderful virtues!

JACQUES. I love only once.

EMMA. To how many women have you told that?

JACQUES. To only one: to you.

EMMA. That's said just for effect. Never mind. You're not offering me your respect, or society's—

JACQUES. We'll go to a foreign country.

EMMA. I love Paris.

JACQUES. Then we'll stay.

EMMA. Yes, and be waked up some morning by a policeman and have to spend three months in jail for complicity in adultery! No, thanks!

JACQUES. But you can't withstand my passion. Our life together would be so sweet. I would fill your life with tenderness, respect, ardor! Oh, if you only knew what a poet's love was!

EMMA. Ah, I have very good reasons to know what it is.

JACQUES. You?

EMMA. Yes, I; and I know what an artist's family life is.

JACQUES. No, you can't——

EMMA. I tell you, I do—from experience.

JACQUES. How?

EMMA. I see I must tell you a little about my life. The story will be brief. So much the worse for you.

JACQUES. Go on.

EMMA. Emma Vernier is my maiden name.

JACQUES. You're married!

EMMA. As you are. Like Daudet's tambourine player, it came to me when I was listening to the song of the nightingale. I was an ordinary young girl, with a greater thirst for ideals, more poetical, fuller of fancies—if you will—than many another. I owe that temperament to Lamartine. He is to blame.

JACQUES. Lamartine?

EMMA. Yes. And they say that the works of the Naturalists are dangerous! I tell you, "Pot Bouille" could never have turned my head like that! In a word, one evening in company with some friends of my father's I met a young poet who recited his verses. They understood his verses then. My head was turned by them; I

was really sick with love; my parents finally consented to our marriage. Ah, the ridiculous things we said, about the union of two hearts, and the irresistible power of shared passion!

JACQUES. Is your husband still living?

EMMA. Yes.

JACQUES. Do I know him?

EMMA. Yes. It was at your home that I met him again, after four years of separation.

JACQUES. Here?

EMMA. Right here—only the other day.

JACQUES. What is his name?

EMMA. In the public records his name is Baptiste Ducloux; in literature, Alexandre Veule.

JACQUES. He?

EMMA. Yes, he, the man who wrote the quatrain. Our family life lasted three years. [*In an undertone.*] I blush with shame when I think of it. That poet carried his poetry nowhere but in his brain, and only when he wrote. His heart was dry; he was the most earthly person imaginable. I can't begin to tell you what I suffered. Re-read "L'Ami des Femmes," and think of Jane de Simerose. He repelled me by his stinginess, shocked and surprised me by his business astuteness, disgusted me by his nasti-

ness. I tell you, a poet of his sort, in private, is not a pleasant thing to contemplate. As I said, he has no feeling—no heart—except when he writes. When he came home in the middle of the night, reeking with the odour of pipes and women, he used to beat me—or else, he was gay, which was much worse. I took a lover, a tradesman from Havre—he's just died—he was the true poet!

JACQUES. Poor woman!

EMMA. Artists' wives *are* poor women. I know there are happy ones, but very few. Finally, when I met Louise, I was on my way from Havre with the vicious intention of breathing again the same atmosphere in which I had suffered. There!

JACQUES. That is no reason why I shouldn't love you.

EMMA. Keep your love, my dear sir. [*She puts on her hat and gloves.*] You remind me of the other. Louise was very good to me; I respect her, and I don't want to cause her any suffering. If she had not been so frank, so sweet, I declare it would have given me a good deal of pleasure to turn your head for you. If she had driven me away, I would have taken you with me. Love her; she is worthier than I, I repeat, and better than you. This does not, of

course, prevent your collaborating on my paper, if you wish. Good evening. *[She goes out.]*

JACQUES *[pacing back and forth for some time before speaking]*. H'm, it's strange what an ass a man can make of himself.

[The left door is partially opened; enter LOUISE.]

JACQUES *[after a prolonged silence]*. I'm a black-guard, and you are a saint, the most loving and worthy of women. I made you suffer. I was mad. Will you forgive me?

LOUISE *[with a cry of joy, as she throws herself into his arms]*. Oh, God has heard me! I have you once more! Jacques! I find you again. Yes, you have made me suffer; I often hid in order to cry to myself, and asked myself what I had done to deserve such pain. I felt untold tortures every day as I saw the gulf that separated us widen. I would never, never have complained to you, and you would never have known how I suffered through your neglect! I would have died——

JACQUES. Louise!

LOUISE. No, my dear Jacques, never would I have allowed your pity to give me the great happiness you're now giving me. I wanted your own heart to prompt you and return to me of its own accord.

JACQUES. So you'll forget it all? You won't reproach me? You'll forgive me?

LOUISE. I'll remember everything, because that memory will prove to me that one ought never to despair of a truly good person. I won't reproach you, because all my sufferings, even if they were a thousand times greater, would not suffice for the joy I feel. Forgive you? There! [*She kisses him.*]

JACQUES. My dear wife!

LOUISE. It's for always now, isn't it?

JACQUES. I swear it.

LOUISE. Oh, thank you. I—I shouldn't have the strength to survive it again. [*She bursts into sobs.*] My poor Jacques, what I have gone through! Let me cry—all my sorrow is going now——

JACQUES. Forget it—send it far away. Dry your tears. Let's be happy as we used to be. Let us love—always.

LOUISE. Always?

JACQUES. Always.

LOUISE. I am very happy.

[*Silence; then the door on the left opens, and*

MME. LEGRAND *enters.*]

MME. L. [*in a loud voice*]. Ah, the silly thing will understand now.

LOUISE. What have you done?

MME. L. What have I done? You may well thank me! I've got rid of that Mademoiselle Vernier for you, for good and all!

JACQUES. Madame——!

MME. L. None of your "madame" with me, monsieur! I know what a mother's duties are. I don't see how you dare raise your voice here.

JACQUES. Tell me, what have you done?

MME. L. Cleansed the house. I put all that young miss's togs in her trunk, anyway—like that! And I sent it all downstairs, into the street. The concierge took it down. [*To LOUISE.*] See, my girl, how lucky you are to have your mother with you!

LOUISE [*looking at JACQUES*]. It was wrong of you.

MME. L. Wrong! I was wrong, was I? Wrong to rid you of that—that——? [*The bell rings.*]

LOUISE. Hush! There's some one at the door.

MME. L. Perhaps it's she. Wait a moment, I'll give her a reception she won't soon forget. [*She goes toward the door.*]

LOUISE [*trying to restrain her*]. Mamma! Please!

JACQUES [*likewise trying to restrain her*]. Please, madame!

MME. L. All right, all right; leave me. I know what I have to do——

[Confusion reigns for a few short moments during which LOUISE and JACQUES do their best to keep MME. LEGRAND from going.]

MME. L. It's for your own good, my dear.
[She opens the door. Silence.]

EMMA'S VOICE. Louise, your behaviour is shameful! You'll be sorry for what you've done!

MME. L. *[to EMMA]*. That's enough, now! Let's not have any disturbance on the stairs. Your things are on the sidewalk—where *you* ought to be!
[She slams the door shut. JACQUES goes out into his study.]

MME. L. *[coming down-stage]*. And now, Louise, you'll have peace in your home.

[JACQUES re-enters, wearing his hat and carrying a cane.]

LOUISE. Where are you going?

JACQUES. To apologize to Mademoiselle Vernier.
[He goes out.]

MME. L. Oh! And you don't try to hold him back? Was I wrong?

LOUISE. I don't know, but perhaps you've made me lose my husband.

Curtain

АСТ III

ACT III

Editorial offices of the "Journal des Poètes Mondains."

The setting is the shape of a right-angled triangle, the hypotenuse of which is the row of footlights. On the left are two large windows opening upon a balcony. Up-stage, on the same side, is a door opening so that the spectator sees the reverse side of it, upon which is written: "Journal des Poètes Mondains. Editorial offices. No admittance to the Public." Half-way up-stage is a fireplace on the mantel above which are a heap of newspapers and a lighted lamp. Down-stage is a door with the inscription: "Editor's Office." Between the two windows on the right, some distance from the wall and facing it, is a long and wide desk; there are a lighted lamp, papers, books, and the like, on it. Down-stage to the right and left are armchairs. Between the windows, against the wall, is a console with chrysanthemums, and above it a lighted gas jet. There is a fire in the fireplace and a chair on either side of it.

As the curtain rises, the two windows and the door are open. The stage is empty a moment, then D'ESTOMBREUSE, CABÈREBAC, and TOMBELAIN enter through the window, down-stage, as PINGOUX and DAVENAY enter through that at the back.

TOMBELAIN. Well, that man got out of it beautifully!

DAVENAY. I'm still quite—er——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Were you frightened?

DAVENAY [*closing the window*]. If the car-driver hadn't performed the miraculous feat of stopping his horses just where he was, and bringing the car to a halt at once, the man would have been killed.

PINGOUX. Close the window, D'Estombreuse, we're freezing!

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*doing so*]. Very amusing to live here, isn't it? and see all the accidents?

DAVENAY. That's why they charge more for the mezzanines.

TOMBELAIN. Lord, how cold it is! [*To the office-boy.*] Well, Cabèrebac, instead of sitting there doing nothing, why don't you close the door of the ante-chamber and put some more wood on the fire?

CABÈREBAC. I? Oh, yes, monsieur. You see,

I was so excited, my legs wouldn't move. [*He rises and goes out at the back, closing the door after him.*]

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Did you hear that cry from the crowd just as the man fell?

PINGOUX. Yes, I was going to speak of that. How strange, that cry from a hundred throats in unison, full of terror and pity; each individual cry was low, but when they all merged, it was a deeply moving clamour——

DAVENAY. Like the cries of the chorus of antiquity.

PINGOUX. That affected me more than the accident itself.

TOMBELAIN. How well we saw everything, in spite of the closed windows!

[*Enter CABÈREBAC with a bundle of faggots, which he throws into the fireplace. He stands by and stirs the fire.*]

D'ESTOMBREUSE. That cry, which I've heard often in the streets, is invariably sensational. Now, one day——

[*TOMBELAIN is seated on the desk, his feet on a chair. PINGOUX and DAVENAY are seated on the chairs by the fire. D'ESTOMBREUSE,*

standing in the centre, rolls a cigarette.

Enter DIVOIRE.]

TOMBELAIN. Hello, here's Divoire.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Haven't seen him for a century.

PINGOUX. How's it going, old boy?

DIVOIRE [*whose manner is serious and timid*].
The boss isn't here, is he?

TOMBELAIN. Tervaux? No, he's gone out.

DIVOIRE. And Mademoiselle Vernier?

TOMBELAIN. The manageress is in, but she can't be seen.

DIVOIRE. Oh!

TOMBELAIN. What's the matter?

DAVENAY. You look as if you were at a funeral.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Are you sick?

DIVOIRE. I haven't the heart to laugh. The cashier has just refused me a louis.

ALL [*seriously, though with an air of indifference*].
Oh!

[They all withdraw a short distance. One of them rubs his clothes with his sleeve, another looks out the window, another whistles in a low tone. There is no more gaiety.]

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*in an undertone*]. He's come to touch us for five francs——

TOMBELAIN. I'm in the same boat with him.

PINGOUX. And if I didn't have dinner invitations——

DAVENAY. We can hardly get our pay.

DIVOIRE. Listen to me, my children. From time to time I've loaned one or the other of you five francs for a drink or so——

PINGOUX. We're willing to offer you a drink, if you like——

DIVOIRE [*his speech punctuated by long pauses*]. No; to-day it's a more serious matter. We're absolutely without a sou at home. I have four little kiddies, you know; this noon we ate potatoes and drank water. Dinner-time is at hand, and there's nothing, nothing to eat. All my belongings are in pawn, and the tickets sold. I tried to pawn my overcoat, but they wouldn't take it. And that's not all: my wife is expecting a baby any day now, and we haven't even a pair of clean sheets. I've been trying to get a louis all day long. Or if I could only get five francs! I'd have gone and gambled for more. But I haven't a blessed thing. [*He restrains his tears.*] I don't dare go home. I tell you, it's not a pleasant thing to hear the little ones keep on saying "I'm hungry!", with anger and suffering in

their eyes. Good God, you must know what I feel to tell you all this. I haven't a shred of credit anywhere. They're freezing to death in our place! [*He sobs.*] And I can't do a thing—nothing—to help matters! [*A pause, during which he manages to control his feelings.*] I beg your pardon. It's ridiculous, but I can't help it. Can you lend me five francs?

TOMBELAIN. My poor fellow, I'd really like to, but I swear I can't——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. If you'd only come to me yesterday! I had some cash then, and I'd willingly have let you have some.

PINGOUX [*shaking hands with DIVOIRE*]. My dear friend, try to wait till Monday. I'll have eight hundred francs then, and I'll let you take half.

DAVENAY [*searching in his pocket*]. I have exactly thirty-two sous—for my dinner.

DIVOIRE [*looking from one to the other*]. Then—you can't——?

TOMBELAIN. Well, you see. We're *willing*, but——

PINGOUX. Of course!

CABÈREBAC. Monsieur Divoire, I have five francs—ten, even. Only, I don't dare—— [*He offers DIVOIRE the money.*]

DIVOIRE. Oh, I have no false pride! Thanks! Thank you—all of you. You don't know what a great weight you've taken off my heart. Thank you. [*He shakes hands warmly all round; the others respond with less warmth.*]

D'ESTOMBREUSE. If you'd only told me yesterday——

PINGOUX. Courage, old man!

DAVENAY. Courage! You have talent, a great deal, and you're sure to succeed.

DIVOIRE. Thanks, thanks! [*To CABÈREBAC, as he shakes hands.*] Thank you! [*He goes out with CABÈREBAC.*]

DAVENAY. There was an air of truth about that——

PINGOUX. Nonsense! If he'd only work—I don't like lazy people.

TOMBELAIN. Perhaps it's a gigantic bluff——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Why doesn't he do as we do? Let him shift for himself.

PINGOUX. I've failed, and begun all over again in the Place de la Madeleine——

DAVENAY. Stranger thing happened to me. I was coming in once, at midnight. On the Place Clichy I saw a fellow——

TOMBELAIN. Same one I saw—yes, a tall fellow—a professor of philosophy.

[Enter THE SUB-EDITOR *through the door leading into the editorial office; he wears an apron over a coat, and a white shirt.*]

THE SUB-EDITOR. No more copy?

PINGOUX. Do you want more, after all I've given you?

TOMBELAIN. Why, you must be eating up the copy!

THE SUB-EDITOR [*showing the length of required copy by a string, with which he has measured the missing lines*]. I need that much more.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Two hundred lines!

THE SUB-EDITOR. Just about.

TOMBELAIN [*rising*]. The devil! Come, youngsters, we must produce.

ALL. What! I'm dry! I have nothing more!

PINGOUX. Suppose we quote something from the *Temps*? I'm well acquainted with——

TOMBELAIN. No, no. You, D'Estombreuse, make an appeal to the younger poets——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. I made that appeal already, in the first number.

TOMBELAIN. So much the better, no danger of repeating yourself.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. I have nothing to say.

TOMBELAIN. The boss will appreciate it.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Oh, the boss sweats one enough as it is. Why doesn't he—the author of “*Les Flavescences*”—write it himself?

TOMBELAIN. Then do it for Mademoiselle Vernier's sake.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. The devil!

THE SUB-EDITOR. Then there's to be no copy?

TOMBELAIN. Oh, yes, you'll have it in ten minutes.

THE SUB-EDITOR. All right. [*He goes out.*]

TOMBELAIN. Pingoux, you do it. Say that poetry is in its death-throes, that what is needed is an infusion of young blood——

DAVENAY. As in “*The Woodcutter's Wife.*”

TOMBELAIN. That poets of mere technical excellence abound——

D'ESTOMBREUSE. That has already been said.

TOMBELAIN. That society people, in embracing poetry, will bring to it the precious gift of elegance and the subtlety of their sentiments.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Perfect! And end up with the announcement of a contest——

TOMBELAIN. Exactly.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. With a golden rose for a prize?

TOMBELAIN. No. Don't announce any prize. You'll have just as many contestants. All poems submitted will appear in our December First number.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. We *are* hard up for copy!

TOMBELAIN. And then add a postscript: "Send ten centimes per line to cover the cost of printing this magnificent number, which will be sold for ten francs. Manuscripts are not to be signed, but each will bear a device," and so on. "The number of verses is unlimited."

PINGOUX. Indeed it is!

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Forward, march! [*He goes out down-stage on the right.*]

TOMBELAIN. You, Pingoux, give us fifty lines on that street cry you were describing so beautifully a few moments ago.

PINGOUX [*as he goes out*]. I wish I'd kept still!

DAVENAY. What shall I do?

TOMBELAIN. You write a verse advertisement of *Ethiopian Soap*. We'll try to strike them for a louis day after to-morrow; you'll get five francs.

DAVENAY [*as he leaves*]. And it is to this that I have turned my lyre!

TOMBELAIN [*sitting at the desk*]. I don't care. I won't get mouldy here.

[*Enter ALEXANDRE VEULE.*]

VEULE. How are you, Tombelain?

TOMBELAIN. How are you?

VEULE. Is Mademoiselle Vernier upstairs?

TOMBELAIN. Yes.

VEULE. Tervaux, too?

TOMBELAIN. No: you may go up.

VEULE. Joker! [*He goes out.*]

TOMBELAIN. And to think that Tervaux has no suspicion!

[*Enter CABÈREBAC.*]

CABÈREBAC. Monsieur! Monsieur! A——

TOMBELAIN. What is it?

CABÈREBAC. There's—there's a—in the ante-chamber——

TOMBELAIN. A what?

CABÈREBAC. A subscriber!

TOMBELAIN. A new one?

CABÈREBAC. Oh, no!

TOMBELAIN. Send him to the management, then.

[*CABÈREBAC starts to leave, but returns.*]

CABÈREBAC. Here is Monsieur Tervaux.

[*He goes out. Enter JACQUES.*]

JACQUES [*taking off his hat and coat, which he hangs on a peg*]. Hello, Tombelain!

TOMBELAIN. Hello! How goes it?

JACQUES. So, so. [*Going to the fire and warming his feet*]. Is the paper ready for the press?

TOMBELAIN. Yes.

JACQUES. Any mail?

TOMBELAIN. Yes.

JACQUES. Let's see. [*He goes to his desk, takes the letters, and returns to the fire to open and read them. Reading*]. What does this mean? In the latest number there was a paragraph that Dr. Meilleret doesn't like.

TOMBELAIN. I don't know him.

JACQUES. Here is what he writes: "My dear friend, my attention has been called to your latest number. I cannot bring myself to believe that you would knowingly commit such an infamy, and against me! I shall call on you and talk the matter over this evening.—Meilleret."

TOMBELAIN. I don't understand.

JACQUES. We'll see. [*Taking a paper from the mantel*]. Is this the latest? Yes.—There! Good God, this *is* nasty! Who allowed that to pass?

TOMBELAIN. Oh, *that*? That was madame's.

JACQUES. Are you sure?

TOMBELAIN. Of course.

JACQUES. This is going too far!

TOMBELAIN. If you don't need me——?

JACQUES. No!

TOMBELAIN. I'll leave you, then. Shall we see you this evening at the café?

JACQUES. Probably. Good-bye.

TOMBELAIN. Good-bye. [*He goes out.*]

JACQUES. Why did she do it? H'm, that's easy to see: she knows that Meilleret continues to call on my wife and daughter, and she is trying to make me angry with the Doctor. This can't last!

CABÈREBAC [*entering*]. I've just sent off that paper order.

JACQUES [*preoccupied*]. All right. [*Taking hold of himself.*] What? What's that you say?

CABÈREBAC. The paper—the two hundred reams—all that was left.

JACQUES. Yes. Well?

CABÈREBAC. It's gone. They called for it.

JACQUES. They called for it? Who?

CABÈREBAC. Why, the people we sold it to——

JACQUES. Sold it——? Tell the cashier to come up at once.

CABÈREBAC. Very well, monsieur. [*Aside.*] I suppose I've put my foot in it! [CABÈREBAC goes out.]

JACQUES. He's mistaken. He can't have sold the paper! Why in the world——? He's crazy. Ah, here's Bernard.

[Enter BERNARD, the cashier.]

What's this I hear, Bernard? The paper——?

BERNARD. The two hundred reams—all there was on hand—gone——

JACQUES. Gone? How do you mean?

BERNARD. Sold!

JACQUES. Who gave the order?

BERNARD. Madame. Not good business, either!

JACQUES. Explain what you mean.

BERNARD. Why, to sell paper at ten francs that we paid fifteen for a month ago.

JACQUES. Do you mean to say we sold paper at a loss of five francs a ream?

BERNARD. Didn't you know? Of course, the purchaser paid his two thousand in cash——

JACQUES. To you?

BERNARD. Yes, only madame took it from me at once.

JACQUES. Oh, that will do. You may go.

BERNARD. And—I forgot. They came to-day for the money.

JACQUES. What money?

BERNARD. For the paper we bought a month ago.

JACQUES. Did you pay?

BERNARD. With what? The safe is so well cleaned out that the editors haven't a sou in advance.

JACQUES. Well, then?

BERNARD. They left a document: you have until to-morrow noon to pay.

JACQUES. And unless I do——?

BERNARD. Unless you do—protest and everything that goes with it.

JACQUES. I'll pay.

BERNARD [*aside, as he turns to go*]. I doubt it.

JACQUES. Monsieur Bernard, tell Cabèrebac to ask madame to come down.

CABÈREBAC [*entering*]. Doctor Meilleret wishes to speak with monsieur!

[BERNARD *goes out*.]

JACQUES. Tell him to come in.

[CABÈREBAC *goes out as* MEILLERET *enters*.]

JACQUES [*advancing to greet* MEILLERET]. I know

what brings you, old man. I'm quite put out about it. The paragraph you blame me for allowing to appear—I beg your pardon—I——

MEILLERET. Well?

JACQUES. Well? What more do you want? You have been offended, and I express my regret.

MEILLERET. Is that all?

JACQUES. The only other thing I can offer you is reparation with arms. You have the right to ask it.

MEILLERET. Fortunately!

JACQUES. I am quite at your disposal, monsieur; my friends——

MEILLERET [*interrupting*]. I know the rest. This, then, is the situation: you have outraged me in a most cowardly fashion—me, your oldest friend. You make vague excuses, and when I refuse to be satisfied with them, you treat me like a stranger, and call me “monsieur”; you offer to fight a duel with me——

JACQUES. I'm very busy, and I——

MEILLERET. And you want to have things over with. I am not in such a hurry. Suppose I accept your proposal?

JACQUES. Yes?

MEILLERET. I let it be known then that the gen-

tleman so indicated in your paper is I. If I should happen to wound you, I should be no better off than I am now. If I am wounded, I shall have one more enemy. I have already proved that I am not afraid to fight, and I don't need the publicity.

JACQUES. Then sue me!

MEILLERET. And be dragged through the mud by your lawyer, and get a hundred francs' damages and interest. No, thank you!

JACQUES. What can I say? There's the Reinach Law!

MEILLERET. The first thing I ask of you is not to make me ridiculous; and since these are the only reparations you are ready to offer, I am just as willing to forgive you anyway. You couldn't give me a single word of true friendship, and you received me like a stranger. I pity you for having fallen so low.

JACQUES. I have not fallen. I'm a newspaper man, and my profession is one that no one need be ashamed of, and to which every one owes respect.

MEILLERET. You a newspaper man! No, you are not. I place journalism on a much higher plane; precisely because I respect it so much am I defending it against you.

JACQUES. Meilleret!

MEILLERET. Understand me: true journalism is the mouthpiece of the public conscience, listened to with intelligence and recorded with sincerity. What you are doing, what every one here does, is to run after subscribers, often advertising; you offer publicity to simple-minded poets and vain society people. It may be business, but it's an underhanded, interloping business, and that is all! It has about as much resemblance to true journalism as prostitution has to love!

JACQUES. So you went to the trouble of coming here to deal me out these low commonplaces. You might much better have stayed at home!

MEILLERET. If that was all I had to say, I should never have come. I bring you news of your wife and daughter.

JACQUES. Go on!

MEILLERET. They have wept for you! Louise is seriously ill; she barely escaped death.

JACQUES. Is she better now?

MEILLERET. Yes.

JACQUES. I'm glad. And Gabrielle?

MEILLERET. She is waiting for you to come back.

JACQUES. Poor little girl!

MEILLERET. And she asked me to tell you——

JACQUES. Tell her I still love her.

MEILLERET. Tell her that yourself.

JACQUES. I? Her mother would never forgive me!

MEILLERET. Yes, I promise she would.

JACQUES. Does she know you are here?

MEILLERET. Yes. Come, old friend, return and do your duty as an honorable man.

JACQUES. It's too late: I can't.

MEILLERET. Think well.

JACQUES. I cannot.

MEILLERET. Why?

JACQUES. You would never understand. I can't. Go away! Good-bye! Oh, pity me!

MEILLERET. I do pity you—with all my heart. Good-bye! *[He goes.]*

JACQUES. How I must love Emma, to sacrifice my best friend for her, after my wife and child! I—I feel so empty, and alone!

[Enter TOMBELAIN, followed by PINGOUX.]

TOMBELAIN. Tervaux, it seems your big scheme has failed.

PINGOUX. Aren't there to be any more issues?

JACQUES. Yes, only we're skipping a number.

TOMBELAIN. We're not getting any advance! I want two louis.

PINGOUX. And I want five.

JACQUES. Wait a few days. Till to-morrow—perhaps to-morrow——

TOMBELAIN. Oh, tell that to your paper dealer—the one you've been treating so high-handedly!

PINGOUX. So high-handedly that it can't last, I tell you!

TOMBELAIN. Yes, but with us——

PINGOUX. If there's no more cash forthcoming, good-bye.

TOMBELAIN. Good-bye.

JACQUES. My dear friends!

PINGOUX. Your friends!

TOMBELAIN. We're not your friends, we're your editors, and we need money.

JACQUES. You may all——

DIVOIRE [*whose drunken voice is heard outside*]. I want to come in. Good God! I want to come in!

PINGOUX. Sounds like Divoire's voice!

DIVOIRE. I don't give a damn! I tell you, I don't give a damn!

TOMBELAIN. He's drunk.

DIVOIRE [*entering, right, supported by D'ESTOMBREUSE and DAVENAY*]. Let me go, damn you. Let me go or I'll smash your faces!

D'ESTOMBREUSE [*releasing him*]. Well, then, do as you like!

[DIVOIRE *is unmistakably drunk; his clothes are in disorder; he has a wild look. His coat is open, tie torn, waistcoat unbuttoned. He staggers to and fro, grunting, tottering, imposing silence on the others.*]

DIVOIRE [*stopping before JACQUES and offering him his hand*]. How are you, Jacques? Is your wife well? [*To the others.*] Eh, why do you look at me—like that?

TOMBELAIN. Come, Divoire, you're drunk. You ought to go home.

DIVOIRE. Home? Go home? Never. Ye hear; never! I'm going to have—a gay time of it for three days—for a week—for a month. Ye understand, I'm going to have a gay time—all the time, all the time. *You're* not going to stop me. I tell ye, I'm going to do whatever I like——

PINGOUX [*aside*]. These drunkards!

DAVENAY. Divoire, shut up! How is your wife?

DIVOIRE. My wife—yes—I came here to ask you for ten francs for her, and for the kiddies—they were hungry. I got the money here, and then I got

drunk. It isn't my fault, old man, I swear it isn't my fault. [*Becoming maudlin.*] I—I met what d-ye-call-'im, and he said "Come and have an absinthe." I couldn't refuse—and then we talked. I was led on. I stood treat for several—I don't know who I treated. I've got forty-three sous left. There they are. I don't need 'em. [*He takes the small change from his pocket and throws it on the floor.*] Now—I don't dare go home. [*He falls into a chair and sobs, with his head on a table.*]

TOMBELAIN. Come, Divoire! Cheer up! Courage, old man!

DIVOIRE. Go to hell, damn it all! Go to hell! You're a nest of good-for-nothings! You're the ones who've brought me to this, with your after-midnight theories, your upside-down principles, and your hind-side-before ideas, that are narrower and more foolish than the others! I was a fool to drink in your words, and crazy to listen to your ideas of right and wrong. I was the only one who took you seriously; you based your lives on the sceptical and the unusual, the way others base theirs on faith and what—what is right. The geniuses we have scoffed at! Musset and Victor Hugo, and all the rest who really did something. How we laughed at them all—

how we did laugh! And the moment any one of us rose above the average, how we tore him to pieces! The friend of yesterday was the Philistine of to-day. You trampled in the mud everything that I respected: filial love, parents' love, honour, and even friendship! *Poseurs* and wasters, that's what you are! [*He laughs.*] Your castles in the air were very funny, only you ought to have warned me that they were only castles in the air! Perhaps it wasn't enough for you to lie to yourselves—you *are* only a pack of liars! You lie when you talk of art; you lie when you breed hatred against others, just as you lie when you pretend to admire yourselves, and flatter each other. You're all failures—[*his manner softening a little*—and I'm no better than you.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Look at yourself. You borrowed ten francs just a short time ago. You've gone and drunk them up, you return drunk, and come to insult us.

DIVOIRE. I'm full—let's go have something to drink.

TOMBELAIN. Yes, let's have something to drink.

DAVENAY. That's better than saying insulting things.

PINGOUX. Jacques, you know we need money.

JACQUES. I haven't any.

D'ESTOMBREUSE. You haven't any? I tell you, we've got to have it, or you look out for the bailiff. We're getting a little tired of this!

JACQUES. Come back in half an hour and I'll give you your money.

TOMBELAIN. Come on, then!

DAVENAY. In half an hour!

D'ESTOMBREUSE. Come, Divoire, here's your hat.

TOMBELAIN [*as he leaves*]. And don't be such a bore when you're drunk! [*They go out, talking.*]

[JACQUES remains silent a moment, then EMMA enters.]

EMMA. So you want to see me? What is it?

JACQUES. I'll tell you——

EMMA. Go on!

JACQUES. My dear, I wish to avoid any quarrels between us in regard to money matters.

EMMA. So do I.

JACQUES. But I am forced—you understand, I have charge of this concern, and——

EMMA. Well?

JACQUES. I wish to ask you: did you sell the paper?

EMMA. Yes. Wasn't it mine to dispose of?

JACQUES. Oh, yes, I don't deny that. You see—don't be angry, now—I merely wish to know——

EMMA. Of course. Dear me, how hot it is! Will you open the window?

JACQUES [*doing so*]. But you sold it at a loss of five hundred francs!

EMMA. What?

JACQUES. The paper.

EMMA. Oh, yes, the paper. You keep harping on that paper.

JACQUES. Did you take the two thousand francs?

EMMA. Did you know it? Yes, I did.

JACQUES. We can't bring out the number for to-morrow.

EMMA. It will appear with a delay notice.

JACQUES. But the paper——?

EMMA. Oh, that paper again!

JACQUES [*impatiently*]. Well, I must speak of it; you won't let me go on——

EMMA. Oh, I shan't say another word!

JACQUES. Do you know that the paper you sold has not yet been paid for?

EMMA. No, but you say so. Go on.

JACQUES. We were presented to-day with a bill for three thousand francs; that is what we owe.

EMMA. Really? Close the window; there's a draught.

JACQUES [*doing so*]. You're right. [*Returning to her.*] It must be paid by to-morrow morning.

EMMA. What? The bill?

JACQUES. Yes.

EMMA. Then pay it.

JACQUES. There's no more money in the safe.

EMMA. Well, what can I do about it?

JACQUES. This isn't our only debt! It means bankruptcy!

EMMA. Use that as a title in the next number: "At last we are bankrupt!" You will complain of the indifference of the century to poetry—*your* poetry——

JACQUES. Now you're making fun of me. Listen to me: we have bought paper on account and sold it again at a loss. That's embezzlement. This means not only bankruptcy for us, but jail!

EMMA. For you!

JACQUES. What!

EMMA. Yes, for you: you're the editor-in-chief. Everything is signed by you. This is not my affair.

JACQUES. You're not going to leave me in the

lurch like this! You still have the money, haven't you?

EMMA. No, and if I had, I wouldn't sink it in the paper. You couldn't make it live; it's dead now. Good-bye.

JACQUES. You don't understand! You can't understand! After what you've done, if we don't pay to-morrow, we'll be bankrupt. Bankruptcy, that means the police——!

EMMA. What can I do about it?

JACQUES [*becoming excited*]. You tell me that so coolly? I'm about ready to commit suicide, and you don't turn a hair!

EMMA. And if I were to cry myself dry, would it help matters?

JACQUES [*going to her and forcing her to a standing position*]. Emma, take care! You may as well admit it: you don't love me any more. You're glad of what has happened, because you want to leave me!

EMMA. No, I don't want to leave you—for the present, at least, but you make me tired. Let go of my hands, you're hurting me! Will you let go! [*Aside.*] You brute!

JACQUES. What did you say?

EMMA. I say you make me tired! Yes, I *have* had enough of you. Now, does that satisfy you?

JACQUES. So I've left my home and family for you, deserted the most loving of wives——

EMMA. Go back to your wife, and go to the devil! I'm not keeping you, the door is wide open.

JACQUES. Remember what sacrifices I've made for you——

EMMA. What about me? I printed "*Les Flavescences*" for you. It's not my fault if people won't buy copies at three sous a kilo. I've put thirty thousand francs into the paper. They're gone. Who got anything out of it? You! It was through me that you got academic honours on the 14th of July.

JACQUES. What of my lost happiness, my happiness——?

EMMA. You make me laugh. What if I asked for my money! How would you give me that? I make you a present of it. You and your happiness!

JACQUES. What do you mean?

EMMA. I mean that when a man accepts money from his mistress, he has no business posing as a mistreated creature.

JACQUES. Don't insult me, do you hear? Don't insult me!

EMMA. Oh, dear me! What a fool I was when I consented to live with you!

JACQUES. What about me? If I had it to do over again——

EMMA. I suppose it was *I* who led you on! I must have been terribly anxious to revenge myself on your fool of a wife!

JACQUES. I forbid you to speak that way of Louise! She's far better than you!

EMMA. She can't be, because you left her for my sake.

JACQUES [*threateningly*]. That's enough.

EMMA. You'll not strike me, or bully me, either. I may have stood it long ago—with *him*, but now——

JACQUES. Ah, you're a woman without heart, or dignity, or shame!

EMMA. Another reason. You interest me. And what are you?

JACQUES. I'm better than you, at any rate!

EMMA. I don't see much difference. Sounds well for you to talk of having a heart! You! When a man leaves his wife and daughter as you have, without even stopping to think where their bread and butter will come from, he's nothing but a joke!

Do you hear, a joke? In what way are you better than I? You've just spoken of your honour; the judges will have something to say about that to-morrow or next day! And your talent! Oh, dear; you wrote one or two little books when you were young, and you've lived on your reputation ever since. You're written out. You a poet! You're just an arranger of words. A man of talent, ha! You're a failure!

JACQUES [*flaring up*]. And you are a vulgar woman of the streets! When such women are insolent, they deserve nothing better than a slap!

EMMA. Take care, or I'll call for help and have you put out!

JACQUES. I'll have you put out.

EMMA. Go ahead.

JACQUES. Where will you go? Who has any use for you?

EMMA. I needn't worry about that. So you insist? Well, I'll tell you: I've found my husband again!

JACQUES. Alexandre Veule-Ducloux.

EMMA. Yes, Ducloux, and I love him, I love him. I've told him, and he has forgiven me. I'm going away with him. At once, too. Good-day! [*She starts to go.*]

JACQUES. Emma! Emma! [*He drags her back.*]

EMMA. What do you want?

JACQUES. Wait, wait! [*A very long pause, during which an inner struggle takes place in JACQUES. He says in a choked voice.*] I'm—I'm a miserable black-guard! [*His head bowed, he says in an undertone.*] Emma, I love you still. I can't bear to have you go. You are so good—— [*He falls into a chair and sobs.*]

EMMA [*between her teeth*]. That *would* be easier!

JACQUES [*falling to his knees*]. Forgive me! Please forgive me. Only stay! I'm mad about you. I love you. Emma, forgive me. Why don't you say something? Pity me. Don't I deserve to be pitied? I'm suffering the tortures of hell. I'm humble, see? I'm a coward. I'll do anything you tell me to! Forgive me!

EMMA [*tapping him on the cheek*]. Come, get up, you animal!

JACQUES. How good you are! Then it's all over and forgotten? Tell me you're not angry with me.

EMMA. All right. But what are you going to do?

JACQUES. Obey you.

EMMA. But—to-morrow?

JACQUES. About the paper?

EMMA. Yes, about the paper.

JACQUES. I'll see——

EMMA. You must see at once.

JACQUES. Yes, you're right. I'll arrange it.

EMMA. Speak to the cashier, he may be expecting some money to-morrow.

JACQUES. Of course.

EMMA. Go and find out. I'll wait for you here. Hurry up.

JACQUES. I'll go at once. [*As he leaves.*] I was absolutely in the wrong, I confess.

EMMA [*accompanies him to the door, then, after a pause, calls*]. Cabèrebac!

[*Enter CABÈREBAC.*]

CABÈREBAC. Madame?

EMMA. Go up to my office immediately. M. Alexandre Veule is there; tell him to come down at once. And then go and get a cab. Quick, quick!

[*CABÈREBAC goes out. EMMA goes to the desk, sits down and writes. As she seals the envelope, enter VEULE.*]

EMMA. There. [*Writing the address.*] "Monsieur Jacques Tervaux." What is Alexandre Veule doing, I wonder? There's no time to lose. Oh, here he is!

VEULE. What is it?

EMMA. We're going to get away from here at once. I've just had a scene with Jacques. He's going to be arrested to-morrow. You stay there and wait for him; you won't have long to wait. Tell him I've gone to get the money to save him. Then come up to my room, and take my jewels. They're all ready in my travelling bag—and meet me at the gare Saint-Lazare—the through ticket-office, where I'll be waiting for you. Do you understand?

VEULE. Perfectly.

EMMA. When you come down again, leave this letter with the concierge.

VEULE [*taking the letter*]. “Monsieur Jacques Tervaux.” Are these his walking papers?

EMMA. Yes.

VEULE. Do you love me?

EMMA. I adore you, since you're no longer a poet.

VEULE. Good.

EMMA [*listening at the door*]. He's coming up! Everything's spoiled! No—wait! Speak to him when he comes in.

[*She hides herself in a corner of the room, when the door opens it conceals her. Enter JACQUES.*]

VEULE [*going to JACQUES*]. My dear friend, I have good news for you! Listen. [*He brings JACQUES down-stage with him, as EMMA goes out, unseen.*]

JACQUES. You here? Where is Emma?

VEULE. My wife! Don't worry; she's gone to get money for you. Now pity yourself! You've bewitched her. Oh, if she'd only loved me that way! Happy mortal!

JACQUES. But how does it happen——?

VEULE. That I'm here? I've come to discuss your to-morrow's issue—yes, I know, it's not going to appear. I'll return and see you about it. You see. I come in, and whom do I see but Emma—Mademoiselle Vernier—in tears—saying: “I want to save Jacques, and I will!” Then she took my hands in hers, and said: “I never loved any one but him! He must have money! I'll get it for him. Wait for him, tell him not to worry, that I will save him.” She went out just a moment before you came in.

JACQUES. Thank you!

VEULE. Well, if you don't need me, good-bye! [*As he is about to go, he meets CABÈREBAC at the door.*] Give this letter to Monsieur Tervaux.

[VEULE goes out.]

CABÈREBAC [*letter in hand, advancing into the room*]. Now that you're alone, I can tell you: I'm leaving.

JACQUES. Why?

CABÈREBAC. The paper doesn't appear any more. I'm willing to be an office assistant here, that is a literary pursuit, but to be a servant, never!

JACQUES. Very well.

CABÈREBAC. Let me give you a bit of advice: the paper dealer is very angry with you. You'd better clear out, or to-morrow you'll find a couple of cops here. Here's a letter for you. [*He gives JACQUES the letter and goes out.*]

JACQUES. From Emma! [*He reads.*] This is the last stroke! She's leaving me! Every one is leaving me! What shall I do? Wait and be taken to jail? Good God, no! [*He takes his hat and coat from the hook and turns down the gas.*] Keep on living? It's not worth while. There is the— [*He opens a drawer in his desk and takes a revolver from it.*] Ah! No cartridges! They were taken out the other day, when we were playing. [*He puts the revolver back into the drawer.*] How? There's the Seine—too cold! And I can swim a little. It would take too long! [*He goes to the window, opens*

it, walks out upon the balcony, and returns.] No, I'm afraid—and it might not finish me! I wish some accident——! I might fall under a 'bus? Yes, that's easy and convenient! [*He puts on his coat, goes to the lamp over the fireplace, then puts on his hat, takes his cane, takes out a cigarette, lights it from the lamp, then extinguishes it, as he says.*] Good-night, life!

[The room is in obscurity. JACQUES goes out at the back. There is a long pause, then a muffled cry is heard in the street below.]

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